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ABSTRACT

The following considerations involved in local control of community colleges are examined in this paper: (1) the proper role of the local board of control as a functional part of the community junior college; (2) the demographic and biographical makeup of community junior college boards of control; (3) the attitudes of community junior college trustees; and (4) questions about the effect of trustees backgrounds and attitudes on the functioning of the community junior college. (Author/KM)

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THE COMMUNITY JUNIOR COLLEGE TRUSTEE: SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT REPRESENTATION

by

Cloyde McKinley Bernd

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THE COMMUNITY JUNIOR COLLEGE TRUSTEE: SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT REPRESENTATION

The community junior college is a social subsystem which is devoted to the allocation of educational values. It is differentiated from other social subsystems with the same general goals by the nature of the educational values which it allocates and by the clientelle it serves.

Social systems and subsystems are controlled in a variety of ways. Although final control of the public community junior college lies with the state; individual institutional governance takes many forms.

In a majority of cases "the local board of control of the public college has complete authority and responsibility-within legal limits drawn by the state-for the organization and operation of the institution."[1]

This paper will attempt to: (1) Delineate the proper role of the local board of control as a functional part of the community junior college. (2) Examine the demographic and biographical makeup of community junior college boards of control. (3) Examine the attitudes of community junior college trustees. (4) Raise some questions about the effect of trustees backgrounds and attitudes on the functioning of the community junior college.

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THE ROLE OF THE BOARD OF CONTROL

The role of the community junior college board of control is seen in different and often conflicting light by various groups which are affected by its actions.

Faculty members often take the position that governance of the community junior college is a matter which should be delegated to themselves. "The basic change required is that of placing more confidence in the abilities of faculty. . . to make responsible judgements and act wisely."[2] Justification for this position is based on the argument that the most important work of the institution is the operation of an educational program. Since faculty members are the most "knowledgeable" about education, they should be represented on the board of control.

Differences are found with respect to the relative amount of power which should exist between the board and the college president. Some board members consider the president an administrative assistant. "As they see it, the community college president is to the locally elected board as the administrative assistant is to the senator."[3] Other trustees maintain that the institution needs a strong president who will be its most important spokesman. Each of the above positions represents vastly different views of board power and the role of the college president.

Although demands have not been as strident as those in four year institutions, students in the community junior college have raised requests for a share of decision making power. In the case of two year institutions "characteristics of the local culture rather than a national student culture or movement seem to affect the degree of involvement. . . in institutional decision making."[4]

Many groups seek to influence the operation of the community junior college but "the board bears the legal responsibility and authority for all aspects of the operation of the institution."[5] This responsibility has been stated in functional terms by different writers. Five functions for a community junior college board of trustees which are commonly identified are:

(1) Selecting, appointing and evaluating the chief executive officer of the institution.

(2) Setting institutional goals and objectives.

(3) Evaluation of the institution in all areas with special reference to administration and instruction.

(4) Public relations: "Selling" the institution to the community and other entities which affect its operation.

(5) Maintaining investments. This involves getting maximum returns for monies which the college has to invest.[6]

Most writers emphasize the primary importance of selecting the chief executive officer with the setting of goals and objectives for the institution as a close second. Other duties besides the five are outlined but they follow no consistent pattern. A board of trustees which performs the functions mentioned in an efficient manner, is doing a great deal to benefit the institution.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF BOARDS OF CONTROL

University, college and community junior college boards of control display a remarkable amount of uniformity with regard to the personal and occupational characteristics of their members. In most cases community junior college boards of trustees are not representative with respect to their constituencies. ". . . The composition of the average board is a residual manifestation of a society that no longer exists in most locales."[7] According to Mills, the typical community college trustee is a "Caucasian male; the holder of a bachelor's degree; a Protestant over 45; an executive, lawyer, doctor or small businessman who earns more than $20,000 a year. . . ."[8] Trustees describe themselves as Republicans by a substantial majority.

Hartnett, in a study of over 500 colleges and universities, found that trustees are generally ". . . male, in their 50's, white, well educated, and financially well-off. They occupy prestige occupations, frequently in medicine, law and education, but more often as business executives. As a group, then, they personify success in the usual American sense of that word."[9] Most are Protestants and identify themselves as Republicans.

Gilliland, in a study of Florida community junior college trustees, made essentially the same findings as Mills and Hartnett but found Florida's trustees to be overwhelmingly Democratic. This difference in political preference between Florida's trustees and national samples may be explained in terms of state politics.[10]

The above findings indicate that the typical trustee is a white, upper middle class, Protestant, Republican, male who is occupationally successful.

ATTITUDES OF MEMBERS OF BOARDS OF CONTROL

The attitudes of university, college and community junior college trustees on issues relevant to higher education have been studied. An examination of this work indicates a considerable degree of uniformity in the opinions of board members from all institutions.

According to Hartnett, 68 per cent of community junior college trustees think attendance at their institution is a privilege rather than a right.[11] This attitude is somewhat inconsistent with the "open door" policy. 53 per cent of community junior college trustees feel that running a college is basically like running a business.[12] Hartnett identified 16 issues and asked trustees where decisions on these issues should take place. The issues ranged from adding or deleting courses through housing, personnel policies, cheating, appointments, etc. In 13 of 16 instances trustees felt the issues should be decided with "administrators and/or trustees having the only major authority."[13] Percentages ranged from 52 per cent on the issue of determining a commencement speaker to 95 per cent on whether to allow fraternities and sororities. The mean percentage of trustees who wished to concentrate decision making power in the hands of administration or themselves in regard to the 13 issues was 71 per cent. The only areas in which the trustees were willing to share their authority were: The addition or deletion of courses; student cheating; and athletic programs. The mean percentage of trustees who would share their authority with students, faculty, or others besides administration in these three areas was 65 per cent.

In general, trustees support a "top down" form of institutional government "often preferring to exclude even members of the faculty from those decisions having to do with the academic program of the institution."[16]

SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT TRUSTEE BACKGROUND ATTITUDE IN RELATION TO FUNCTION

The ability of the community junior college board of control to function effectively may be questioned if the attitudes and backgrounds of members are considered.

The most important function of the board is the selection and evaluation of the chief executive officer. What kind of a president will the board of trustees appoint? Will he truly reflect the needs of students who often come from lower socioeconomic classes? Will the president understand the problems of minority students? Will the president be a black, a chicano, a woman? Considering the present composition of community junior college governing boards; the chances are small that the college president will be anything but a high status white male.

Another important function of the board is to set goals and objectives for the institution. Will institutional goals reflect the special needs of the community junior college student? Will the trustees see that the needs of many community college students differ from those of the white middle class?

When trustees evaluate the performance of the institution will those who are to be evaluated have had input into the goal setting process? Will they have had a chance to develop criteria by which they will be evaluated?

How well can the evaluation function be carried out if the trustees do not know the needs of the students?

Public relations is an important function of the board of trustees. This responsibility can be thought of in two ways. The usual aspect of public relations is the selling of the institution to various organizations which affect its well being. This type of public relations involves contact with community groups and governmental bodies as well as selected individuals. Its main function is the securing of funds or appropriations for the institution.

Another kind of public relations for the community junior college involves selling the institution's programs to its potential constituents. Many of these people come from deprived background and are somewhat suspicious of the prevailing power structure. How well can existing boards of trustees aid in the recruitment of students from disadvantaged backgrounds? Are they willing to assist in this area? Can trustees provide linkage between the institution and the entire community or are their interests only with certain parts?

The last trustee function to be discussed is the superintending of investments. Large amounts of income can accrue to the institution if monies are invested by knowledgable people. It will suffice to say that boards as presently constituted should have little difficulty performing this function.

The above questions point out difficulties for a community college board of trustees which is not representative. These difficulties are potentially damaging to the future of the community junior college.

Many trustees maintain that they do represent the community which they serve in spite of differing background and attitude. In some cases this may be true but ". . . every person exercises selective perceptive, has difficulty fully understanding other people's views, and is incapable of truly representing all elements of any community."[17]

What can be done about the problem of representation? Tendler and Wilson suggest that board members should resign so that they can replaced by members of unrepresented groups.

> If there is a significant Black population in the college district and no Black on the board, a board member should step down, so that a Black can be appointed, or a Puerto Rican, or a Mexican-American, or a woman, or a labor representative.[18]

Although board members are public spirited individuals, it is somewhat doubtful that they will begin resigning in droves to make their boards representative. This is borne out by Mills who found that although some trustees concede that recent charges of nonrepresentation are true, 72 per cent feel that <u>their</u> board is quite representative.[19]

Advisory committees consisting of students, faculty and/or community members have been successful in providing needed insight to board members in some cases.

It is doubtful that these committees can replace actual representation on the the board unless they are given real power and responsibility.

The need for better representation of boards of control of community junior colleges is apparent but little has been done to determine the effect of nonrepresentativeness on individual institutions. What happens in community colleges which have mainly businessmen, or doctors, or lawyers, or educators on the board of control? What effects do different kinds of representation have on the curriculum, on admissions, on the philosophy and goals of the institution? We can merely speculate on these questions until boards of control of specific institutions are studied.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Clyde E. Blocker, Robert H. Plummer, and Richard C. Richardson, The Two Year College: A Social Synthesis (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1965), p. 88.

[2] Edmund J. Gleazer, Jr., Project Focus: A Forecast Study of Community Colleges (New York: McGraw Hill, 1973), p. 44.

[3] Gleazer, "Who Decides?" The Two Year College Trustee National Issues and Perspectives, Report of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Washington, D.C., Dec., 72 (Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1972), p. 11.

[4] Gleazer, Project Focus, p. 148.

[5] Harold F. Landrith, Introduction to the Community Junior College (Danville Ill.: Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1971), p. 129.

[6] Functions of the community junior college board of control appear in the following works: Blocker, Plummer and Richardson, p. 181; Algo D. Henderson, The Role of the Governing Board, Report of the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, Washington, D.C., Vol. 10 No. 2, Oct., 1967 (Washington, D.C.: Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges, 1967), p. 17; Samuel M. Nabrit and Julius S. Scott, Jr., Inventory of Academic Leadership (Atlanta Georgia: The Southern Fellowships Fund, 1968), p. 17; Mitchell Tendler and Richard E. Wilson, Community College Trustees: Responsibilities and Opportunities (Washington D.C.: American Association of Junior Colleges, 1970), p. 6.

[7] Tendler and Wilson, p. 4.

[8] Peter K. Mills, "Community College Trustees: A Survey," The Two Year College Trustee: National Issues and Perspectives, p. 32.

[9] Rodney T. Hartnett, College and University Trustees (Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1969), p.19.

[10] Florida has been a "one party" state until recently. John R. Gilliland, "Members of Boards of Trustees of Florida Junior Colleges: Their Personal Characteristics and Opinions About Institutional Role and Governance" (unpublished dissertation, University of Florida, 1969), p.23.

[11] Hartnett, p. 25.

[12] Ibid., p. 28.

[13] Ibid. , p. 33.

[14] Mills, Table 4. , p. 38.

[15] Gilliland, p. 37-43.

[16] Hartnett, p. 50.

[17] Tendler and Wilson, p. 5.

[18] Ibid. , p. 4.

[19] Mills, p. 37.

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